

Portland Press Herald

UMaine gets \$6 million federal grant for forest economy research

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The University of Maine announced Tuesday that it is receiving a \$6 million federal grant from the National Science Foundation to lead a project to create better data on New England's forest and its economic impact.

The project brings together researchers from the University of Maine, the University of New Hampshire and the University of Vermont to build a digital framework that analyzes and visualizes data about the region's forests.

"Forests are changing rapidly, while the technology to better monitor them is, too," Aaron Weiskittel, a professor of forest biometrics and Irving Chair of Forest Ecosystem Management at the University of Maine, said in a news release. "I hope this project can help support and sustain northern New England's unique working forests, which many rural communities rely on for their livelihoods."

The project will focus on developing better near real-time and high-resolution data in areas such as forest health and tree species composition, which in the past have been unreliable or inconsistently available, the release said.

Of the \$6 million, \$3 million is contingent on project progress and availability of funds.

The hope is for the data to be accessible to scientists, land managers and policymakers and that it can be used to strengthen workforce development and broaden participation in STEM education.

In a separate news release Tuesday, Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King of Maine applauded the grant and said establishing a digital monitoring system will help better assess, understand and forecast changes that directly impact Maine's forest economy.

"Maine's forests are a vital contributor to our state's economy, particularly in rural communities, and that's why it's so important that we continue to find new opportunities to support and sustain this plentiful natural resource," the senators in a joint statement. "The research done by the University of Maine's faculty and students has already helped create new, sustainable uses that boost our economy and conserve our forests."

"This grant will modernize their important work, improve the data collection process and provide comprehensive, near real-time information to ensure that both our forest products industry and our forest ecosystems will continue to support good-paying Maine jobs."

Source: <https://www.pressherald.com/2019/08/27/umaine-gets-6-million-federal-grant-for-forest-economy-research/>